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VARNASHRAMADHARMA

BY

M. K. GANDHI

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BY
M. K. GANDHI

Compiled By
R. K. PRABHU

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TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

Harijan, 29-4-'33, p. 2 M. K. Gandhi

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CHAPTER 1

VARNASHRAMADHARMA

I

Every one will admit that Hinduism is nothing without the law of Varna and Ashrama. It would be impossible to find any Smriti work of which a large part was not devoted to Varnashramadharma. This law of Varna and Ashrama is to be traced to our most ancient scriptures—the Vedas, and so no one who calls himself a Hindu may ignore it. It is his duty to study it in all its bearings, and to reject it if it is an excrescence, and to foster it and restore it to its pristine purity, if it represents a universal law.

So far as the law of Ashrama is concerned, it is extinct, alike in profession and observance. Hinduism lays down four Ashramas or stages—the life of a Brahmachari (continent student), the life of a Grihastha (householder), the life of a Vanaprastha (who has retired) and the life of a Sannyasi (renunciator) —through which every Hindu has to pass to fulfil his purpose in life. But the first and the third are practically non-existent today, the fourth may be said to be observed in name to a small extent. The second is professed to be observed by all today, but it is observed in name, not in spirit. Grihasthas or householders of a kind we are all, inasmuch as we eat and drink and propagate our kind, like all created beings. But in doing so, we fulfil the law of the flesh and not of the spirit. Only those married couples who fulfil the law of the spirit can be said to observe the law of Grihasthashrama. Those who live the mere animal

life do not observe the law. The life of householders of today is one of indulgence. And as the four stages represent a ladder of growth and are interdependent, one cannot leap to the stage of a Vanaprastha or a Sannyasi, unless he or she fulfilled the law of the first two Ashramas—Brahmacharya and Grihastha. The law of the Ashrama, therefore, is a dead letter today. It can be revived only if the law of Varna, with which it is intimately interlinked, is revived.

That brings us to a consideration of the law of Varna. Varna is intimately, if not indissolubly, connected with birth, and the observance of the law of Varna means the following on the part of us all of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers in a spirit of duty. Those who thus fulfil the law of their Varna can be counted on one's finger's ends. This performance of one's hereditary function is done as a matter of duty, though it naturally carries with it the earning of one's livelihood. Thus, the function of a Brahmana is to study and to teach the science of Brahman (or spiritual truth). He performs the function, as he cannot do otherwise, as it is the law of his being. That secures him his livelihood, but he will take it as a gift from God. A Kshatriya will perform the function of protecting the people in the same spirit, accepting for his livelihood whatever the people can afford to give him. A Vaishya will pursue wealth-producing occupations for the welfare of the community, keeping for himself enough for his own maintenance and rendering the balance to the community in one shape or other. A Shudra will perform physical labour in the same spirit of service.

Varna is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of

Brahmana parents will be called a Brahmana, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahmana when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahmana. He will have fallen from Brahmanahood. On the other hand, one who is born not a Brahmana but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahmana will be regarded as a Brahmana, though he will himself disclaim the label.

Varna thus conceived is no man-made institution but the law of life universally governing the human family. Fulfilment of the law would make life livable, would spread peace and content, end all clashes and conflicts, put an end to starvation and pauperization, solve the problem of population and even end disease and suffering.

But if Varna reveals the law of one's being and thus the duty one has to perform, it confers no right, and the idea of superiority or inferiority is wholly repugnant to it. All Varnas are equal, for the community depends no less on one than on another. Today Varna means gradations of high and low. It is a hideous travesty of the original. The law of Varna was discovered by our ancestors by stern austerities. They sought to live up to the law to the best of their capacity. We have distorted it today and have made ourselves the laughing stock of the world. No wonder that we have today amongst the Hindus a section which is bending its energies to a destruction of the institution which in their opinion spells the ruin of the Hindus. And certainly one need have no mercy for the hideous distortion, which means nothing but destruction of Hinduism.

II

I do not for a moment suggest that there should be no restrictions about food and drink or about marital relations. I do not myself regard it a duty to eat whatever is offered and in whatever company I should chance to be, and I regard it as nothing short of self-indulgence to marry according to one's fancy. Strict restraint is the law of life and must, therefore, govern these relations no less than others. I hold that there are rules about diet. Man is not a omnivorous animal, nor may he pick up his mate wherever he likes. But restrictions on marital or social relations have nothing to do with Varnadharma, which is a different thing altogether. I can conceive blameless marital relations between different Varnas, and people of different Varnas seated together to eat food permissible to all. There is evidence enough to show that in ancient times there were no watertight compartments between Varnas, so far as marital and social relations went, and I have no doubt that, in making Varna a mere matter of restrictions about food and drink and marriage, we have done Hinduism grave harm.

Though the law of Varna is a special discovery of some Hindu seer, it has universal application. Every religion has some distinguishing characteristic, but if it expresses a principle or law, it ought to have universal application. That is how I look at the law of Varna. The world may ignore it today but it will have to accept it in the time to come.

The four Varnas have been compared in the Vedas to the four members of the body, and no simile could be happier. If they are members of one body, how can one be superior or inferior to another? If the

members of the body had the power of expression and each of them were to say that it was higher and better than the rest, the body would go to pieces. Even so, our body politic, the body of humanity, would go to pieces, if it were to perpetuate the canker of superiority or inferiority. It is this canker that is at the root of the various ills of our time, especially class wars and civil strife. It should not be difficult for even the meanest understanding to see that these wars and strifes could not be ended except by the observance of the law of Varna. For it ordains that every one shall fulfil the law of one's being by doing in a spirit of duty and service that to which one is born.

Harijan, 28-9-1934, pp. 260-62

CHAPTER 2

VARNA AND ASHRAMA

So far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of Varna is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as the traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the law of our being, if we would accept the definition of man given in all religions. Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not therefore to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker, and from this definition it was that the

Rishis of old discovered this law of our being. You will realize that if all of us follow this law of Varna we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God. You will at once then see that nine-tenths of the activities that are today going on throughout the world and which are engrossing our attention would fall into disuse. You will then be entitled to say that Varna as we observe it today is a travesty of the Varna that I have described to you. And so it undoubtedly is, but just as we do not hate truth because untruth parades itself as truth, but we sift untruth from truth and cling to the latter, so also we can destroy the distortion that passes as Varna, and purify the state to which the Hindu society has been reduced today.

Ashrama is a necessary corollary to what I have stated to you, and if Varna today has become distorted, Ashrama has altogether disappeared. Ashrama means the four stages in one's life, and I wish the students who have kindly presented their purses to me—the Arts and Science students and the Law College students—were able to assure me that they were living according to the laws of the first Ashrama, and that they were Brahmacharis in thought, word and deed. The Brahmacharya Ashrama enjoins that only those who live the life of a Brahmachari, at least up to 25 years, are entitled to enter upon the second Ashrama, i.e. the Grihasthashrama. And because the whole conception of Hinduism is to make man better than he is and draw him nearer to his Maker, the Rishis set a limit even to the Grihasthashrama stage and imposed on us the obligation of Vanaprastha and Sannyasa. But today you will vainly search throughout the length

and breadth of India for a true Brahmachari, for a true Grihastha, not to talk of a Vanaprastha and Sannyasi. We may, in our elongated wisdom, laugh at this scheme of life, if we wish to. But I have no doubt whatsoever that this is the secret of the great success of Hinduism. The Hindu civilization has survived the Egyptian, the Assyrian and the Babylonian. The Christian is but two thousand years old. The Islamic is but of yesterday. Great as both these are they are still in my humble opinion in the making. Christian Europe is not at all Christian, but is groping, and so in my opinion is Islam still groping for its great secret, and there is today a competition, healthy as also extremely unhealthy and ugly, between these three great religions.

As years go by, the conviction is daily growing upon me that Varna is the law of man's being and therefore as necessary for Christianity and Islam, as it has been necessary for Hinduism and has been its saving. I refuse, therefore, to believe that Varnashrama has been the curse of Hinduism, as it is the fashion nowadays in the South on the part of some Hindus to say. But that does not mean that you and I may tolerate for one moment or be gentle towards the hideous travesty of Varnashrama that we see about us today. There is nothing in common between Varnashrama and caste. Caste, if you will, is undoubtedly a drag upon Hindu progress, and untouchability is, as I have already called it or described it, an excrescence upon Varnashrama. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields. In this conception of Varna, there is absolutely no idea of superiority and inferiority. If I again

interpret the Hindu spirit rightly all life is absolutely equal and one. It is therefore an arrogant assumption on the part of the Brahmana when he says, 'I am superior to the other three Varnas.' That is not what the Brahmanas of old said. They commanded homage not because they claimed superiority, but because they claimed the right of service through and through without the slightest expectation of a reward. The priests, who today arrogate to themselves the function of the Brahmana and distort religion, are no custodians of Hinduism or Brahmanism. Consciously or unconsciously they are laying the axe at the root of the very tree on which they are sitting, and when they tell you that Shastras enjoin untouchability and when they talk of pollution distance, I have no hesitation in saying that they are belying their creed and that they are misinterpreting the spirit of Hinduism. You will now perhaps understand why it is absolutely necessary for you Hindus who are here and listening to me to energize yourselves and rid yourselves of this curse. You should take pride in leading the way of reform, belonging as you do to an ancient Hindu State. So far as I can read the atmosphere around you here, the moment is certainly propitious for you if you will sincerely and energetically undertake this reform.

From a speech delivered at Trivandrum on 9-10-1927

Young India, 20-10-1927, p. 355

CHAPTER 3

THE LAW OF VARNA

Q. We do not understand your emphasis on Varnadharma. Can you justify the present caste system? What is your definition of Varna?

A. Varna means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The law of Varna is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or chooses his father's profession. Varna therefore is in a way the law of heredity. Varna is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus, but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of nature—the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation. Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the law of Varna. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

Varna has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of Varna. It is this travesty of Varna that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the law of Varna is largely responsible both for our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of

unemployment and impoverishment, and it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith.

But in quarrelling with the present monstrous form, and monstrous practices to which the original law has been reduced, do not fight the law itself.

Q. How many Varnas are there?

A. Four Varnas, though it is not a rigid division inherent in Varna itself. The Rishis after incessant experiment and research arrived at this fourfold division—the four ways of earning one's livelihood.

Q. Logically, therefore, there are as many Varnas as there are professions?

A. Not necessarily. The different professions can easily be brought under the four main divisions—that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service. So far as the world is concerned, the dominant profession is the wealth-producing, just as Grihasthashrama is the most dominant amongst all Ashramas. Vaishya is the keynote among the Varnas. The defender is not wanted if there is no wealth and property. The first two and the fourth are necessary because of the third. The first will always be very few because of the severe discipline required for it, the second must be few in a well-ordered society, and so the fourth.

Q. If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what Varna does he belong to?

A. According to the Hindu belief he belongs to the Varna in which he is born, but by not living up to it he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being—a *patita*.

Q. A Shudra does an act which belongs to a Brahmana by birth. Does he become a *patita*?

A. A Shudra has as much right to knowledge as a Brahmana, but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain his livelihood through teaching. In ancient times there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. Today he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs. 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain, and a physician like Hakimsaheb thinks that he must charge Rs. 1,000 a day for his medical advice!

Q. But may not a man follow a profession after his heart?

A. But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his fathers. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession, on the contrary it is noble. What we find today are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' calling, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone by there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was an honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal

professions were deservedly called liberal when the motive was purely philanthropic.

Q. All that is under ideal conditions. But what do you propose today when every one is hankering after paying professions?

A. It is a sweeping generalization. Put together the number of boys studying in schools and colleges and determine the percentage of boys going in for the learned professions. Highway robbery is not open to every one. The present seems to be an agitation for highway robbery. How many can become lawyers and government servants? Those who can be legitimately occupied in earning wealth are Vaishyas. Even there, when their profession becomes a highway robbery, it is hateful. There cannot be millions of millionaires.

Q. So far as Tamilnad is concerned, all non-Brahmanas want to take up professions to which they were not born.

A. I reject your claim to speak on behalf of the 22 million Tamilians. I give you a formula: *Let us not want to be what every one else cannot be*. And you can work out this proposition only on the basis of Varna as I have defined it.

Q. You have been saying that the law of Varna curbs our worldly ambition. How?

A. When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. Varna is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

Q. You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. Today those who follow their fathers' professions have no spiritual culture at all—their very Varna unfits them for it.

A. We are talking with crooked notions of Varna. When Varna was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not even learn the Gita, if every one who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to re-arrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have today, and we cannot do it unless we follow the law of Varna.

Q. You will excuse us, if we go back to the same question over and over again. We want to understand it properly. What is the Varna of a man practising different professions at different times?

A. It may not make any difference in his Varna so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profession from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth degrades himself and falls from Varna.

Q. A Shudra may have all the qualities of a Brahmana and yet may not be called a Brahmana?

A. He may not be called a Brahmana in this birth. And it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a Varna to which he is not born. It is a sign of true humility.

Q. Do you believe that qualities attaching to Varna are inherited and not acquired?

A. They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

Q. Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character?

A. That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. But you and I do not need to go deeper into this question for understanding the law of Varna as I have endeavoured to explain to you. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

Q. Caste, as we see it today, consists only in restrictions about interdining and intermarriage. Does preservation of Varna then mean keeping these restrictions?

A. No, not at all. In its purest state, there can be no restrictions.

Q. Can they be omitted?

A. They can be, and Varna is preserved even by marrying into other Varnas.

Q. Then the mother's Varna will be affected.

A. A wife follows the Varna of her husband.

Q. Is the doctrine of Varnadharma, as you have expounded it, to be found in our Shastras, or is it your own?

A. Not my own. I derive it from the Bhagavadgita.

Q. Do you approve of the doctrine as given in the Manusmriti?

A. The principle is there. But the applications do not appeal to me fully. There are parts of the book which are open to grave objections. I hope that they are later interpolations.

Q. Does not the Manusmriti contain a lot of injustice?

A. Yes, a lot of injustice to women and the so-called lower 'castes'. All is not Shastra that goes by that name. The Shastras so called therefore need to be read with much caution.

Q. But you go by the Bhagavadgita. It says Varna is according to *guna* and *karma*. How did you bring in birth?

A. I swear by the Bhagavadgita because it is the only book in which I find nothing to cavil at. It lays down principles and leaves you to find the application for yourself. The Gita does talk of Varna being according to *guna* and *karma*, but *guna* and *karma* are inherited by birth. Lord Krishna says, all Varnas have been created by me—चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टम्—i.e., I suppose by birth. The law of Varna is nothing, if not by birth.

Q. But there is no superiority about Varna?

A. No, not at all, though I do say Brahmanism is the culmination of the other Varnas, just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service, but not superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worthy of being trampled under foot.

Q. Kural you know. Do you know that the author of that Tamil classic says there is no caste by birth? At birth, he says, all life is equal.

A. He says it as an answer to the present-day exaggerations. When superiority was claimed by any Varna, he had to raise his voice against it. But that does not cut at the root of Varna by birth. It is only the reformer's attempt to cut at the root of inequality.

Q. The present practice is so distorted, that may it not be the best thing to give it up altogether and begin on a clean slate?

A. Only if we were creators. We cannot by a stroke of the pen alter Hindu nature. We can find out a method of working the law, not destroying it.

Q. When authors of Shastras created new Smritis, why not you?

A. If I could create a new creation! My state then would be far worse than Vishwamitra's and he was far greater than I.

Q. So long as you do not destroy Varna, untouchability cannot be destroyed.

A. I do not think so. But if Varna goes to the dogs in the removal of untouchability, I shall not shed a tear. But what bearing has Varna as defined by me on untouchability?

Q. But the opponents of reform quote you in support.

A. That is the lot of every reformer. He will be misquoted by interested parties, but you also know that some of them want me to relinquish Hinduism. Others would banish me if they could from the Hindu fold. I have gone nowhere to defend Varnadharma, though for the removal of untouchability I went to Vaikom. I am the author of a Congress resolution for propagation of Khadi, establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity, and removal of untouchability, the three pillars of Swaraj. But I have never placed

establishment of Varnashramadharma as the fourth pillar. You cannot therefore accuse me of placing a wrong emphasis on Varnashramadharma.

Q. Do you know that many of your followers distort your teaching?

A. Do I not know it? I know that I have many followers only so called.

Q. Buddhism was driven out of India because Brahmanas dominated the organization. Similarly they will drive Hinduism out, if it does not serve their end.

A. Let them dare. But I am certain that Buddhism has not gone out of India. India is the country that imbibed most of the spirit of the Buddha. Buddhism must be distinguished from the spirit of the Buddha as well as Christianity from the spirit of the Christ. They were successful in driving out Buddhism, because they had assimilated the central teaching of the Buddha.

Q. The same Brahmana who assimilated the good things of Buddhism has committed the worst crimes, worse than the Amritsar wrong, by not allowing untouchables entry into temples and imposing on them cruel disabilities.

A. You are right to a certain extent. But you are wrong in fixing the guilt on Brahmanas. It is the whole of Hinduism that is responsible. Varnadharma having become distorted gave rise to untouchability. There was no deliberate wickedness, but the result was a human tragedy.

Q. But so long as you use the word Varnashramadharma, it brings in with it the evil associations of today.

A. The moral is, destroy the evil association and restore Varnadharma to its purity.

My Programme for You

Q. There is an utter state of confusion. How shall we go back?

A. All I have to say to you is, do not destroy the foundation, let us try to purify. Instead, you are trying to deliver a new religion to receive which no one is prepared. Brahmanism is synonymous with Hinduism. That is to say, the only term we had for Hinduism was Brahmanism, i.e. Brahmavidya, and in trying to destroy that, you are trying to destroy Hinduism. Fight the Brahmana inch by inch, when he encroaches on your rights and try to reform him. But it is no use blackguarding every Brahmana. There are Brahmanas and Brahmanas. One is an out and out reformer, the other is an opponent of reform. You must range the best of the reformer Brahmanas on your side, and with their help carry out the constructive part of your programme, which can bring about the salvation both of Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas.

Fight the opponents of reform and tell them, 'We shall not call you Brahmanas if you pursue wealth and power, and if you are not learned and are not able to teach us the true religion.' Then you will not evoke any opposition from them. You will carry on a fierce agitation to bring about reform, you will boycott the schools and temples which distinguish against any non-Brahmanas. You will insist upon priests of pure character, of learning and without worldly ambition. You may build new temples if the old ones refuse to admit the so-called untouchables.

Then there is the question of interdining. I should not make that a ground for quarrel with anybody. But I should boycott a function where there was a dividing line.

Then I would fraternize with untouchables and try to deal by them as I should with a blood-brother, and break to pieces all little castes and sections. And therefore when I marry my boy I will go out of my way and seek a girl from other subsections. We are really so hidebound today by wretched custom that you will not give me a girl to domicile in Gujarat, and you will not take a girl from Gujarat to settle in Tamilnad.

Then I would give the untouchables religious education, a grounding in the principles of Hinduism and morality. They are leading a purely animal life today. I would induce them to refrain from eating forbidden food and live a pure and clean life. You can easily expand these questions and work out a big constructive programme.

Young India, 24-11-1927, pp. 390-91, 395-96

CHAPTER 4

NONE SUPERIOR AND NONE INFERIOR

In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of Advaita and my interpretation of Advaita excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All—whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever—have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men

that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief, that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the Brahmanas themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth, or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. *I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being.* And there is the amplest warrant for the belief that I am enunciating in the Bhagavadgita, and I am therefore through and through with every non-Brahmana when he fights this monster of superiority, whether it is claimed by a Brahmana or by anybody else. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

But in spite of all my beliefs, that I have explained to you, I still believe in Varnashramadharma. Varnashramadharma to my mind is a law which, however much you and I may deny, cannot be abrogated. To admit the working of that law is to free ourselves for the only pursuit in life for which we are born. Varnashramadharma is humility. Whilst I have said that all men and women are born equal, I do not wish therefore to suggest that qualities are not inherited; but on the contrary I believe that just as every one inherits a particular form so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, and to make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That frank admission, if he will act up to it, would put a legitimate curb upon our material ambitions, and thereby our energy is set free for extending

the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution. It is this doctrine of Varnashramadharma which I have always accepted. You would be entitled to say that this is not how Varnashrama is understood in these days. I have myself said times without number that Varnashrama as it is at present understood and practised is a monstrous parody of the original, but in order to demolish this distortion let us not seek to demolish the original. And if you say that the idealistic Varnashrama which I have placed before you is quite all right you have admitted all that I like you to admit. I would also urge on you to believe with me that no nation, no individual, can possibly live without proper ideals. And if you believe with me in the idealistic Varnashrama, you will also strive with me to reach that ideal so far as may be. As a matter of fact the world has not anywhere been able to fight against this law. What has happened and what must happen in fighting against the law is to hurt ourselves and to engage in a vain effort; and I suggest to you that your fight will be all the more successful if you understand all that our forefathers have bequeathed to us and engage in fighting all the evil excrescences that have grown round this great bequest.

From a speech delivered at Tanjore on 16-9-1927

Young India, 29-9-1927, p. 329

As I have interpreted Varnadharma, there is no bar in any shape or form to the highest mental development. The bar altogether normal is against change of hereditary occupation for the sake of bettering one's material condition, and thus setting up a system of unhealthy and ruinous competition which is today robbing life of all its joy and beauty.

Harijan, 29-7-1933, p. 8

If I had the power, I should declare that we are all Hindus, all of the same Varna. As I have made it clear over and over again there is no real Varna today. When we have come to our own, when we have cleansed ourselves, we may have the four Varnas according to the way in which we can express the best in us. But Varna then will invest no one with a superior status or right, it will invest one with higher responsibility and duties. Those who will impart knowledge in a spirit of service will be called Brahmanas. They will assume no superior airs but will be true servants of society. When inequality of status or rights is ended, every one of us will be equal. I do not know, however, when we shall be able to revive true Varnadharma. Its real revival would mean true democracy.

Harijan, 4-4-1936, pp. 57-58

CHAPTER 5

VARNASHRAMA OR VARNASANKARA?

A fair friend writes:

"In a place where the whole station was lined from one end to the other with volunteers dressed in military style with swords hanging at their sides, where the whole air was redolent with reminiscences of bravery and chivalry of men of the military caste of India, was not your message urging them in a way to substitute the music of your wheel for the music of their sword a preaching of the Dharma of your caste to all castes *ad absurdum* like the Christian missionary? Should you not rather like the sages of ancient India exhort a Brahmana to be a true Brahmana, a Kshatriya to be an ideal Kshatriya, and a Vaishya to be a model

Vaishya? The insignia of the Brahmana is the book or pen, of the Kṣhatriya the sword, and of the Vaishya the wheel or the plough. You may well pride yourself in being called a weaver or an agriculturist as thereby you are true to the natural tendencies of your *jati* or to Vaishyadharma. But why would you, a Hindu, a believer in Varnashrama principles, help in the degradation of a Brahmana or a Kshatriya by insisting on their accepting Vaishyadharma and rejecting or neglecting their respective *jati-dharmas?* Can a Kshatriya not serve and protect the poor even in these days but in the Vaishya way?

"The great men of India have always upheld Swadharma for each individual temperament. You are the first of them to preach the throwing in of the Dharmas of all people into the same melting pot and thereby Vaishyaizing the whole nation. Uplift the Vaishya by all means but pray do not pull the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas by their legs. Spiritualize your caste people but do not materialize the men of other castes by turning them into spinners and weavers with the spell of your personality. To my thinking a Vinoba and a Balkoba would have rendered more potent service to the nation as pure Brahmanas with their intellects fully developed rather than as spiritual weavers which you have turned them into."

I have not reproduced the whole of the letter but I have given the cream of it. The rest is a commentary on the extract quoted by me. The friend is born and claims to be a Hindu even as I claim to be one. As I have regarded spinning to be superior to sectional religions, I had hoped that I would not be misunderstood by cultured friends. But it was not to be. The friend tells me she is not the only one to oppose the Charkha. I must therefore endeavour patiently to examine the argument. I have noted in the

course of my journalistic experience dating from 1904 that most of the criticism received by editors is based upon an imperfect understanding of an opponent's statement. In the case in point if only the friend had borne in mind that I had presented the message of the wheel not to the Hindus alone but to all Indians without exception, to men and women, to Musulmans, Parsis, Christians, Jews, Sikhs and all others who claimed to be Indians, she would have written differently. She would then have inferred that I had placed before the people of India something which not only did not come in conflict with the several religions but which in so far as it was taken up added lustre to one's own religion and in Hinduism to one's own Varna or caste. Mine therefore I claim to be a method not of confusion but cleansing. I ask no one to forsake his own hereditary Dharma or occupation but I ask every one to add spinning to his natural occupation. The Rajputs of Kathiawad knew this. They asked me whether I wanted them to give up their swords. I told them I wanted them to do no such thing. On the contrary, I added, I wanted each one of them to possess a trusty sword so long as they believed in it. But I certainly told them that my ideal Rajput was he who defended without the sword and who died at his post without killing. A sword may be snatched from one, not so the bravery to die without striking. But this is by the way. For my purpose, it is enough to show that the Rajputs were not to give up their calling of protecting the weak. Nor do I want the Brahmanas to give up their vocation as teachers. I have suggested to them that they become better teachers for sacrificial spinning. Vinoba and Balkoba are better Brahmanas for having become spinners and

weavers and scavengers. Their knowledge is more digested. A Brahmana is one who knows God. Both these fellow-workers are nearer God today by reason of their having felt for and identified themselves through spinning with the starving millions of India. Divine knowledge is not borrowed from books. It has to be realized in oneself. Books are at best an aid, often even a hindrance. A learned Brahmana had to learn divine wisdom from a God-fearing butcher.

What is this Varnashrama? It is not a system of watertight compartments. It is a recognition to me of a scientific fact whether we know it or not. A Brahmana is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a Brahmana who refuses to labour will be voted down as an idiot. The Rishis of old who lived in the forests cut and fetched wood, tended cattle and even fought. But their pursuit in life was pre-eminently search after Truth. Similarly a Rajput without learning was good for nothing no matter how well he wielded the sword. And a Vaishya without divine knowledge sufficient for his own growth will be a veritable monster eating into the vitals of society as many modern Vaishyas whether of the East or the West have become. They are, according to the Gita 'incarnations of sin who live only for themselves'. The spinning wheel is designed to wake up every one to a sense of his duty. It enables every one better to fulfil his Dharma or duty. When a vessel is running on smooth waters, work on board is exquisitely divided. But when it is caught in the grip of a violent storm and is about to sink, every one has to give a helping hand to the necessary work of life-saving.

Let us also bear in mind that with the rest of the world India finds herself in the deadly coil of the mercantile cobra. It is a nation of shop-keeping soldiers that claims to rule her. It will tax all the resources of all her best Brahmanas to unwind India from that coil. Her learned men and her soldiers will therefore have to bring their learning and their prowess to bear upon the mercantile requirements of India. They must, therefore, in order to be able faithfully to carry out their Dharma, learn and practise spinning.

Nor have I the least hesitation in recommending hand-weaving as a bread-winning occupation to all who are in need of an honest occupation. To the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and others, who are at the present moment not following their hereditary occupation but are engaged in the mad rush for riches, I present the honest and (for them) selfless toil of the weaver and invite them with a view to returning to their respective Dharmas to be satisfied with what little the handloom yields to them. Just as eating, drinking, sleeping etc. are common to all castes and all religions, so must spinning be common to all without exception whilst the confusion, selfish greed and resulting pauperism persist. Mine therefore is a method not of making Varnasankara—confusion worse confounded—but it is one of making Varnashrama—cleansing more secure.

Young India, 17-7-1924, pp. 238-39

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN AND VARNA

An esteemed friend writes:

"From your recent writing on Varna in the *Harijan* it seems that the principle of Varna adumbrated by you is intended to apply only to men. What, then, about women? What would determine a woman's Varna? Perhaps you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her Varna from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for women at any stage of her life, that before marriage she must remain under the tutelage of her parents, after marriage under that of her husband and, in the event of her widowhood, under that of her children?

"Be that as it may, the fact remains that ours is an era of woman suffrage and that she has definitely entered the lists with men in the pursuit of independent avocations. It is, thus, the commonest thing nowadays to find a woman serving as a school-mistress, while her husband is doing business as a money-lender. To what Varna would the woman under these circumstances belong? Under the Varnashrama dispensation, a man would normally take up the avocation and, therefore, also the Varna of his parents, while a woman would adopt that of her parents; and they may well be expected to stick to their respective avocations after their marriage. To what Varna between these would their children belong? Or would you leave the question to be decided by the children themselves, by their free, independent choice? In the latter case, what becomes of the

heredity basis of Varna which the Varnashramadharma, as expounded by you, postulates?"

In my opinion, the question raised is irrelevant in the circumstances prevailing today. As I have pointed out in the writing referred to, owing to the confusion of the Varnas, today there are in reality no Varnas, the Varna principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four Varnas today exist in name only. If we must talk in terms of Varna, there is only one Varna today for all, whether men or women; we are all Shudras.

In the resuscitated Varnadharma, as I conceive it, a girl before her marriage will belong to the Varna of her father, just like her brother. Intermarriages between different Varnas will be rare. A girl will, therefore, retain her Varna unimpaired even after her marriage. But should the husband belong to a different Varna, then, on marriage, she would naturally adopt his Varna and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of Varna be understood to imply a slur against anybody or touch anybody's susceptibilities since the institution of Varna in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four Varnas.

I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well-ordered society the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

Nor do I see in this any invasion of woman's rights or suppression of her freedom. The saying attributed to Manu that "For woman there can be no freedom" is not to me sacrosanct. It only shows that probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *ardhangana*, 'the better half', and *sahadharmini*, 'the help-mate'. The husband addressing the wife as *devi* or 'goddess' does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a status of inferiority. But there could be no question of depreciation of her Varna. For, Varna does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligations only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it. The woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides.

I need hardly say after this that, if the position set forth by me with regard to the role of the woman in society is accepted, the question of the Varna of the children will cease to present any problem, as there will be no more any discrepancy as between the Varnas of the husband and wife.

Harijan, 12-10-1934, pp. 276-77

CHAPTER 7

VARNASHRAMA AND INTERDINING AND INTERMARRIAGE

Varnashrama is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his Varna by choice. Not to abide by one's Varna is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing.

I do not believe, that interdining or even intermarriage necessarily deprives a man of his status that his birth has given him. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower. All are born to serve God's creation: a Brahmana with his knowledge, a Kshatriya with his power of protection, a Vaishya with his commercial ability and a Shudra with bodily labour. This however does not mean, that a Brahmana, for instance, is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a Brahmana predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing again, to prevent the Shudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only, he will best serve with his body and need not envy others their special qualities for service. But a Brahmana who claims

superiority by right of knowledge falls and has no knowledge. And so with the others who pride themselves upon their special qualities. Varnashrama is self-restraint and conservation and economy of energy.

Though therefore Varnashrama is not affected by interdining or intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It undoubtedly is a religion of renunciation of the flesh so that the spirit may be set free. It is no part of a Hindu's duty to dine with his son. And by restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint. Hinduism does not regard a married state as by any means essential for salvation. Marriage is a 'fall' even as birth is a 'fall'. Salvation is freedom from birth and hence death also. Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul. But this self-denial is no test of Varna. A Brahmana may remain a Brahmana, though he may dine with his Shudra brother, if he has not left off his duty of service by knowledge. It follows from what I have said above, that restraint in matters of marriage and dining is not based upon notions of superiority. A Hindu who refuses to dine with another from a sense of superiority misrepresents his Dharma.

Unfortunately today Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Once I horrified a pious Hindu by taking toast at a Musalman's house. I saw that he was pained to see me pouring milk into a cup handed by a Musalman friend, but his anguish knew no bounds when he saw me taking toast at the Musalman's hands. Hinduism is in danger of losing

its substance if it resolves itself into a matter of elaborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things, but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.

Young India, 6-10-1921, pp. 317-18

Varnashrama, as I interpret it, satisfies the religious, social and economic needs of a community. It satisfies the religious needs, because a whole community accepting the law is free to devote ample time to spiritual perfection. Observance of the law obviates social evils and entirely prevents the killing economic competition. And if it is regarded as a law laying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it, but their duties, it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth, though it may not be an ideal, i.e. strictly equal distribution. Therefore, when people in disregard of the law mistake duties for privileges and try to pick and choose occupations for self-advancement, it leads to confusion of Varna and ultimate disruption of society. In this law, there is no question of compelling any person to follow the parental occupation against his or her aptitude; that is to say, there can be no compulsion from without as there was none for, perhaps, several thousand years, during which the law of Varnashrama worked without interruption. By training, the people had recognized the duty and the justice of the law, and they voluntarily lived under it. Today, nations are living in ignorance

and breach of that law and they are suffering for it. The so-called civilized nations have by no means reached a state which they can at all regard with equanimity and satisfaction.

It is easy enough to see that this conception of Varnashrama has nothing to do with restrictions as to interdining and intermarriage. The Vedas and the Mahabharata are filled with illustrations both of interdining and intermarriage. But these are matters of choice, not a matter of religious regulation. No one can be compelled or required to dine with any other or contact marital relations. No doubt social habits will grow up and regulate these things more or less rigidly. But it would be wrong to dignify them by the name of religious observances. In so far as they are a matter for reform, they must be treated, in my opinion, as an absolutely separate subject, unconnected either with untouchability or even with Varnashrama reform.

So far as the multiplicity of castes apart from Varnashrama is concerned, they are essentially trade guilds or societies, with intermarriage and interdining restrictions of a more or less rigid character superimposed upon them. Castes are as numerous as the leaves of the famous banyan tree whose every branch becomes a trunk for shooting out more branches. They are undergoing a perpetual transformation. Many have disappeared and new ones are appearing. Surely, they have nothing to do with Varnashrama; nor have they anything to do with religion. That today they are regarded by Sanatanists as an integral part of Hinduism arises, in my opinion, from an utter ignorance of the working of these trade guilds. There are undoubtedly many undesirable practices that have

crept into these corporations, but that is only because Hinduism as a religion has ceased to be a living, vitalizing force. We are today living upon capital which is itself being fast exhausted.

Harijan, 4-3-1933, p. 5

CHAPTER 8

DR. AMBEDKAR AND CASTE

The following has just been received from Dr. Ambedkar:

> "At the end of our conversation on Saturday last you asked me to send a message for insertion in the first issue of your new weekly *Harijan.* I feel I cannot give a message. For I believe it will be a most unwarranted presumption on my part to suppose that I have sufficient worth in the eyes of the Hindus which would make them treat any message from me with respect. I can only speak as man to man. As such it may be desirable that the Hindus should know my views on the momentous issue of Hindu social organization with which you have chosen to occupy yourself. I am therefore sending you the accompanying statement for publication in your *Harijan.*"

Statement

> "The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu faith of this odious and vicious dogma."

Damodar Hall, B. R. AMBEDKAR
Parel, Bombay 12,
7th February, 1933

Dr. Ambedkar is bitter. He has every reason to feel so. He has received a liberal education. He has more than the talents of the average educated Indian. Outside India he is received with honour and affection, but, in India, among Hindus, at every step he is reminded that he is one of the outcastes of Hindu society. It is nothing to his shame, for, he has done no wrong to Hindu society. His exterior is as clean as that of the cleanest and the proudest Brahmana. Of his interior, the world knows as little as of that of any of us. In spite of all this, he "believes that it will be a most unwarranted presumption on his part to suppose that he has sufficient worth in the eyes of the Hindus which would make them treat any message from him with respect". This is the caste Hindus' shame, not his, but I would like him to feel that there are today thousands of caste Hindus who would listen to his message with the same respect and consideration that they would give to that of any other leader, and that in their estimation there is no person high and no person low. I would like him, too, to know that the *Harijan* is not *my* weekly. So far as the proprietory rights are concerned, it belongs to the Servants of the Untouchables Society and, therefore, I would like him to feel that it is as much his as of any other Hindu.

As to the burden of his message, the opinion he holds about the caste system is shared by many educated Hindus. I have not, however, been able to share that opinion. I do not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from Varnashrama, to be an 'odious and vicious dogma'. It has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and, if it is a by-product of

the caste system it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or a crop because of the weeds. The outcasteness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-lowness'. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnashrama, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other. How it can be and what that Varnashrama is, it is not necessary to examine here. But, such being my faith, I have always respectfully differed from those distinguished countrymen, Dr. Ambedkar among them, who have held that untouchability will not go without the destruction of Varnashramadharma. They have made no distinction between caste and Varna. But that is another story. At the present moment, it is the untouchable, the outcaste, with whom all Hindu reformers, whether they believe in Varnashrama or not, have agreed to deal. The opposition to untouchability is common to both. Therefore, the present joint fight is restricted to the removal of untouchability, and I would invite Dr. Ambedkar and those who think with him to throw themselves,

heart and soul, into the campaign against the monster of untouchability. It is highly likely that at the end of it we shall all find that there is nothing to fight against in Varnashrama. If, however, Varnashrama even then looks an ugly thing, the whole of Hindu society will fight it. For this campaign against untouchability is not one of compulsion, but of conversion. At the end of the chapter, I hope that we shall all find ourselves in the same camp. Should it prove otherwise, it will be time enough to consider how and by whom Varnashrama is to be fought.

Harijan, 11-2-1933, p. 3

CHAPTER 9

AN AMERICAN CLERGYMAN'S QUESTIONS

Q. "In your Hinduism do you basically include the caste system?"

A. "I do not. Hinduism does not believe in caste. I would obliterate it at once. But I believe in Varnadharma which is the law of life. I believe that some people are born to teach and some to defend and some to engage in trade and agriculture and some to do manual labour, so much so that these occupations become hereditary. The law of Varna is nothing but the law of conservation of energy. Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one?"

Q. "Indeed? Do you go so far?"

A. "I do, because I hold a scavenger's profession in no way inferior to a clergyman's."

Q. "I grant that, but should Lincoln have been a wood-chopper rather than President of the U.S.A.?"

A. "But why should not a wood-chopper be a President of the United States? Gladstone used to chop wood."

Q. "But he did not accept it as his calling."

A. "He would not have been worse off if he had done so. What I mean is, one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism. There is no better communism on earth, and I have illustrated it with one verse from the Upanishads which means: 'God pervades all—animate and inanimate. Therefore, renounce all and dedicate it to God and then live.' The right of living is thus derived from renunciation. It does not say, 'When all do their part of the work I too will do it.' It says, 'Don't bother about others, do your job first and leave the rest to Him.' Varnadharma acts even as the law of gravitation. I cannot cancel it or its working by trying to jump higher and higher day by day till gravitation ceases to work. That effort will be vain. So is the effort to jump over one another. The law of Varna is the antithesis of competition which kills."

Harijan, 6-3-1937, p. 27

CHAPTER 10

BRAHMANA–NON-BRAHMANA

To the Brahmana I will say: "Seeing that you are repositories of all knowledge and embodiments of sacrifice and that you have chosen the life of mendicancy, give up all that the non-Brahmana wants and be satisfied with what they may leave for you." But the modern Brahmana would, I know, summarily reject my non-Brahmana interpretation of his Dharma. To the non-Brahmana I say: "Seeing that you have got numbers on your side, seeing that you have got wealth on your side, what is it that you are worrying about? Resisting as you are, and as you must, untouchability, do not be guilty of creating a new untouchability in your midst. In your haste, in your blindness, in your anger against the Brahmanas, you are trying to trample under foot the whole of the culture which you have inherited from ages past. With a stroke of the pen, may be at the point of the sword, you are impatient to rid Hinduism of its bedrock. Being dissatisfied and properly dissatisfied with the husk of Hinduism, you are in danger of losing even the kernel, life itself. You in your impatience seem to think that there is absolutely nothing to be said about Varnashrama. Fight by all means the monster that passes for Varnashrama today, and you will find me working side by side with you. My Varnashrama enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be he Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, whatever he is. My Varnashrama accommodates a *pariah* girl under my own roof as my

own daughter. My Varnashrama accommodates many *panchama* families with whom I dine with the greatest pleasure,—to dine with whom is a privilege. My Varnashrama refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my Varnashrama compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face. Do not therefore swear by words that have, at the present moment, become absolutely meaningless and obsolete. Swear all you are worth, if you like, against Barhmanas but never against Brahmanism. Even at the risk of being understood or being mistaken by you to be a pro-Brahmana, I make bold to declare to you that whilst Brahmanas have many sins to atone for, and many for which they will receive exemplary punishments, there are today Brahmanas living in India who are watching the progress of Hinduism and who are trying to protect it with all the piety and all the austerity of which they are capable. Them you perhaps do not even know. They do not care to be known. They expect no reward; they ask for none. Their work is its own reward. They work in this fashion because they must. It is their nature. You and I may swear against them for all we are worth, but they are untouched. Do not run away with the belief that I am putting in a plea for the Brahmanas, the vakils and the Ministers and even Justices of the High Courts in India. I have not thought of them in my mind at all. What, therefore, both Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas and for that matter everybody who wants India to progress has to do, is to sweep his own house clean. I therefore suggest to non-Brahmanas, who have not yet lost their heads, to think out clearly what it is that they are grieved

over, and make up their minds and fight for all they are worth to remove those grievances.

From a speech delivered at Cuddalore

Young India, 22-9-1927, pp. 318-19

CHAPTER 11

THE MUCH-MALIGNED BRAHMANA

I believe Brahmanism to be unadulterated wisdom leading one to the realization of Brahma, that is God. If I did not hold that view, I should no longer call myself a Hindu. Brahmanas, however, like all the other members of the human family, are not all true representatives of Brahmanism. But I have to believe that, of all the classes in the world, the Brahmana will show the largest percentage of those who have given up their all in search of knowledge, that is Truth. I know of no system other than Hinduism under which a class has been set apart from generation to generation for the exclusive pursuit of divine knowledge and consigned to voluntary poverty. That Brahmanas could not keep up the high standard that they had imposed upon themselves is no special fault of theirs. Their imperfection merely proves that they were as fallible as the rest of mankind, and so corruption crept into the so-called sacred books, and we have the spectacle of the most selfless rules governing Brahmanas side by side with the selfish rules also made by them in order to help their breed. But it was the Brahmanas who rose against the corruptions and selfish interpolations into the sacred texts. It was they who time and again strove to purge themselves and society of evil. I confess that I have the

highest reverence for Brahmanism and a sneaking regard for Brahmanas and that, in spite of what is to me the sorrowful spectacle of Brahmanas so called making a frantic effort against the reform movement and lending their undoubted ability to the opposition, I am consoled, and let every unbiassed Hindu be consoled, by the fact that the reform movement, too, is being led by those who are born Brahmanas but who today take no pride in their birth. If a census was taken of all the workers against untouchability, I think it will be found that the majority of workers who are devoted to the cause without any remuneration or with only just enough to keep body and soul together are Brahmanas. But I admit that Brahmanas as a class have suffered degradation. If they had not, if they had lived up to their profession, Hinduism would not be in the degraded state in which it is. It would be a contradiction in terms to suggest that Hinduism is what it is, in spite of the correct life of the Brahmanas. That could not be, because the Brahmanas themselves have taught us to believe that they are the true custodians of the divine wisdom and that, where there is divine wisdom, there is no fear, there is no grinding pauperism, there is no high and low state, there is no greed, jealousy, war, plunder and the like. Because Brahmanism went down, it drew down with it all the other classes of Hindus, and I have not a shadow of doubt in my mind that, if Brahmanism does not revive, Hinduism must perish, and for me the infallible test of the revival of Brahmanism, that is Hinduism, is the root and branch removal of untouchability. Today Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are mere labels. There is utter confusion of Varnas as I understand it, and I wish

that all Hindus will voluntarily call themselves Shudras. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of Brahmanism and revive Varnadharma in its true state. Because all Hindus may be classed as Shudras, wisdom and power and wealth will not disappear, but they will all be used for the service of not a sectional religion but the service of Truth and Humanity. Anyway, in battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland, "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."

Harijan, 25-3-1933, p. 3

CHAPTER 12

ANTI-BRAHMANISM

With reference to a suspicion that behind his Harijan movement there was a design to undermine Brahmanism Gandhiji said at Guruvayur:

I can only tell you that I cannot be guilty of any such design; for, to me to undermine Brahmanism is to undermine Hinduism. This does not mean endorsement of the claim that the Brahmanas, so called, may put forth today. No man can be accepted as a Brahmana by society merely by reason of his birth. The Shastras themselves say that a born Brahmana who does not act according to the requirements of Brahmanism will forfeit his right to be called a Brahmana by the people in general. There are Brahmanas themselves

today in this very movement who say that they cannot be called Brahmanas unless they carry out the precepts of the Shastras referring to them. I believe that the Brahmana is the corner-stone of Hinduism, as of every other religion. But there you must understand the meaning of the word Brahmana. The Brahmana is the person who has realized Brahma. If he has not that realization in every act of his, he shows that he is ever after it and nothing else. Such a Brahmana demands my ten thousand prostrations every morning but not the Brahmana who is dictated to by self, who is multiplying himself day after day and thinks mostly of himself, rarely of others, nor even the Brahmana who smears himself with ashes from top to toe and can punctiliously and correctly recite the Vedas. It may be necessary for him to smear himself with ashes. It is necessary for him to translate the Vedas in his own life. It is necessary for him to exhibit Brahma in every act of his life. It is necessary for him to be pure and to impart that purity to all his surroundings. It is necessary for him to be ever ready to die that others may live. Now you understand what regard I have for the true Brahmana and Brahmanism.

Harijan, 26-1-1934, pp. 2-3